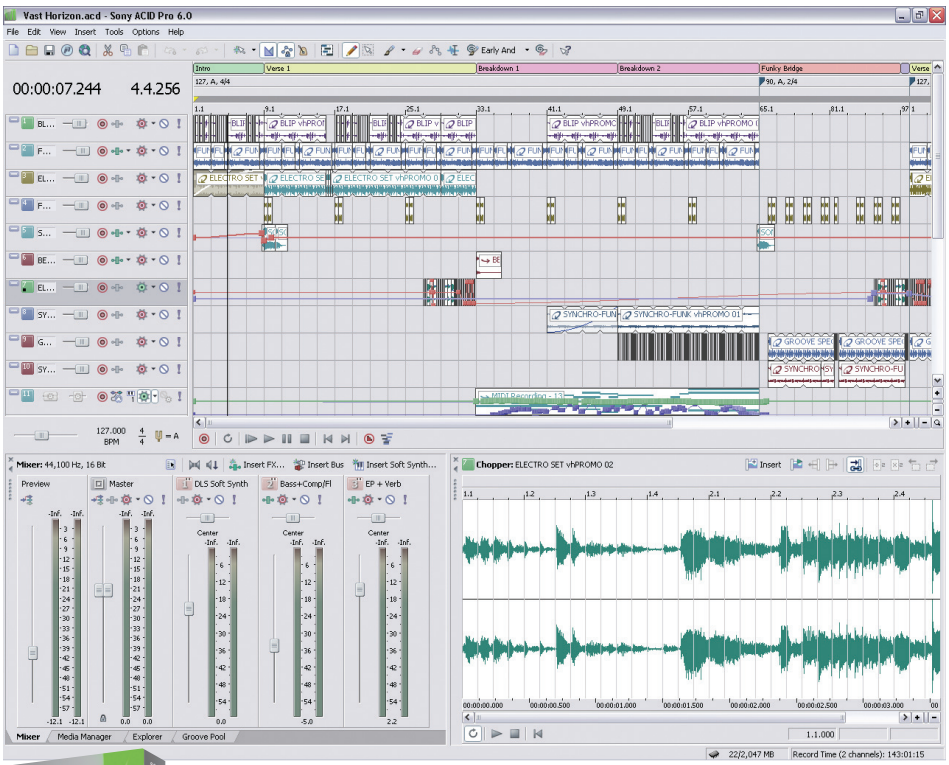
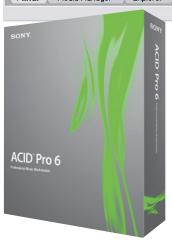




Sony ACID PRO 6 FOR PC

ACID, the original loop-based arrangement tool, has been overhauled, gaining audio and MIDI recording capabilities. Mark Cousins takes a trip with ACID Pro 6...

KEY FEATURES

- **Unlimited audio and MIDI tracks**
- **Real-time pitch- and tempo-matching**
- **VST effect and VSTi support**
- **More than 20 real-time DirectX effects**
- **5.1 surround mixing**
- **ASIO driver support**
- **Groove-mapping quantization tools**
- **Media Manager search technology**
- **ReWire mixer and device support**
- **Video scoring track**

ACID PRO 7

Manufacturer **Sony**

Price **£299**

Contact **SCV London 020 8418 1470**

Web **www.sony.com/acidpro6**

Minimum system requirements
PC 1GHz processor, Windows 2000/XP, 256MB RAM

Although we tend to expect 'elasticated' audio files as standard these days, it wasn't until ACID came along (all the way back in 1998) that we first had access to a completely intuitive, flexible way of creating loop-based music. Since then, an increasing number of DAWs have gone on to implement this kind of functionality, from Ableton's Live – which spun the concept into interactive, 'live' loop-juggling – to Apple's own version of the ACID Loop, the Apple Loop. The original ACID was developed by Sonic Foundry (which also brought us Sound Forge and Vegas) and then latterly acquired by Sony as part of its ever-expanding media division. Under Sony's wing the program has grown, both as a music-production tool, but equally in audiovisual circles for soundtrack creation.

In recent years, however, the application has felt somewhat restricted by its loop-based focus. Although ACID was great for knocking together the bare bones of a track, it lacked the features of a traditional DAW – namely, MIDI and audio recording – that enabled tracks to be embellished and developed. As a result, most users chose to run ACID Pro either as a ReWire slave or render its output and carry out the rest of their creative work in another application. What those users will be pleased to hear, therefore, is that ACID Pro 6 is now a serious, fully functional DAW, complete with 24-bit, 192kHz sound quality, 5.1 support, MIDI sequencing, VST and DirectX audio plug-ins, plus control surface integration.

ACID PRO 6 IS NOW A SERIOUS, FULLY FUNCTIONAL DAW, COMPLETE WITH 24-BIT, 192KHZ SOUND QUALITY.

The ACID test

As well as the application itself, ACID Pro 6 comes with more than 1,000 Sony Sound Series loops and Native Instruments' Kompakt player, so you can get straight to work and start exploring its features. The starting point of a song will often be a quick browse through ACID Pro's Media Manager – arguably the heart of any loop-based arrangement program. The Media Manager is intuitive and easy to use, enabling you to select appropriate loops or single-shot sounds to preview in your arrangement. For example, you could filter files by genre (industrial, blues, folk, rock) or instrument type (brass, strings, electronic drums and so on). Usefully, the loop will also play back in time with the current track and has its own preview volume, enabling you to accurately judge how it will sit in the mix.

Measuring Up

ACID Pro 6's flexible approach to working with loop-based material isn't quite as unique as when it first hit the market back in 1998, with several products now offering similar features. Even so, ACID Pro 6 still holds its own as a quick and intuitive way of putting together a piece of music, and its improved DAW-like functionality can only extend its longevity. Ableton's Live 5 (£299) has undoubtedly marked a new era of audio and MIDI sequencing, with a particular bias towards stage performance. Live 5's Clip Analysis feature enables any audio imported into your song to match the current tempo. If the quality of time compression and expansion is important to you, take a look at Celemony's Melodyne (£499). Recent improvements in Melodyne have made it far more viable as a loop-based remixing tool, and its time stretching and pitch changing algorithms are some of the best in the business.

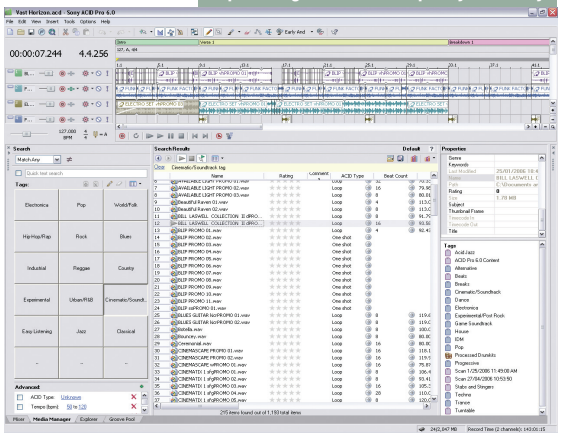
METHOD SPOT

ACID makes a distinction between five media types used in a session: loops, one-shots, beat-mapped clips, MIDI clips and folder tracks. Right-clicking as you drag the appropriate file onto the timeline enables you to set the clip type; alternatively, ACID will auto-detect the clip type as you bring it into your session. Loops follow the tempo of the track; modify the Clip Properties (right-click on the region) to change the way in which tempo-modification is carried out. A one-shot clip stays fixed at its original pitch and duration irrespective of the tempo of the song, while the beat-mapped format is used to ACIDize files longer than 30 seconds.

Arranging the loops involves dragging them onto the track lanes and assembling the finished piece using a series of regions. Understandably, this is an area that has seen big refinements since we last used ACID; it's now much closer to what you'd expect from a traditional DAW. Regions can automatically crossfade as they are dragged on top of each other, and different media files (one-shots, beat-mapped events and loops) can be placed on the same lane. MIDI editing has also been improved, and the track can be expanded to reveal a typical piano-roll or drum grid editor. The MIDI functionality is not as sophisticated as that found in Cubase SX or Logic Pro, but it's certainly as good as that in other audio-based applications such as Pro Tools.

pH balance

While the ability to handle audio and MIDI clearly represents a big leap forward, we feel the mixing functions of ACID Pro 6 could be improved – certainly in comparison to other DAWs. There's plenty of welcome new features, though, including surround panning, automation and the aforementioned control surface support. However, the main mixer fails to show individual track levels, instead offering only a master fader, buss faders, a preview fader and a display showing the levels of any soft synths in the session. If you want to check the track levels you'll need to look at the horizontal sliders on each lane – not the easiest way of conceptualising a mix! However, you can route the track to one of 26 busses, effectively enabling you to create your own vertical channel fader or (a more typical application) an instrument subgroup.



The Media Manager enables you to preview loops or single-shot sounds quickly and easily.

An ACID Pro 6 session in progress, incorporating both audio and MIDI clips.

Get in the Groove

Moving beyond the conventional DAW tools, there are plenty of unique features in ACID Pro 6 that extend the creative possibilities it offers. The Chopper window enables you to dissect a loop, inserting the cut sections onto the current track lane. If you learn the associated keyboard shortcuts, this feature is a great way of adding glitch-and-stutter-type effects into your track.

Grooves are another powerful and welcome feature of ACID Pro 6; the application comes with several preset templates, but you can, of course, create your own. One potential application for them is to use the Groove menu to change the feel of an existing loop – adding more swing to some acoustic drums, for example. The other implied application is to cross-quantize the feel of one loop onto another, so as to tighten up the groove of the track. What's most interesting, however, is the way in which the Groove is applied: simply drag the required Groove from the Groove Pool onto the track and you'll see an additional lane pop up to indicate that quantization is taking place. This is a great visual tool, making it really clear to see what has been quantized, as well as the Groove it has been quantized to.

Given the potential of what can be achieved with these two features alone, it is a shame that ACID Pro 6 doesn't come with a more comprehensive printed manual. The supplied Quick Start booklet serves its purpose, but it would have been good to see a comprehensive breakdown of what ACID Pro 6 can do.

A good trip?

Thanks to all these refinements, ACID Pro 6 is even more of a joy to use. Within seconds of loading the application we began spinning together a variety of loops, spurred on by both the ease of using its principal features (especially the Media Manager) and the inspirational quality of the loops and sounds it includes. Now that ACID offers true DAW-like functionality, there's little to hold you back from producing exciting, polished compositions quickly and easily – indeed, it will even burn a CD of the finished mix for you! Of course, die-hard fans of Cubase or Pro Tools will probably stick to their beloved audio sequencers, but if you want something a little different and use loops as an integral part of the composition process, then ACID Pro 6 is well worth a look. MTM

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Still one of quickest and easiest ways of juggling loops
- Audio and MIDI functionality much improved
- Fantastic variety of quality loops and samples

WALK ON BY

- Mixer section could be improved
- Takes some time to discover its full potential

VERDICT

ACID Pro 6 has become a more rounded and fully functional application, but its original strength – loop-based arrangement – remains ACID's biggest selling point.

★★★★★★★★½☆

BUY THIS PRODUCT AT WWW.MUSICTECHMAG.CO.UK/STORE